

Methodist Episcopal Church,  
Erie Creek Township, Pennsylvania.

HABS No. Pa. 213

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Ralph W. Lear, District Officer  
311-312 Dime Bank Building  
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

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Stone foundations, and walls. Wood shingled roof. Plaster applied directly to stone work, on interior walls. Floors are of wide pine boards.

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METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
Briar Creek, Columbia County, Pennsylvania

This stone structure was erected in 1808 A.D. and was the first Methodist Church in the North Branch Susquehanna Valley. It is located in Briar Creek Township, Columbia County, Pennsylvania, northwest of Berwick, about three miles. It stands in the midst of a small burial ground about one hundred feet off the concrete highway. Here is a Century of Progress.

The early settlers in this section who came here to make a home for themselves, decided that they needed a church in which to worship and a place to provide Christian education for their children. Volunteers, from among the farmers, gathered stones and timber from nearby land, and proceeded to work. The stones were the cheapest and most durable of building materials. Two doors were provided and windows were placed on all four sides. They were not all level; neither height nor spacing was accurate, but it was built with spiritual zealousness, and the satisfaction of work accomplished. In its day, this stone edifice was the most commodious and pretentious church of the denomination, outside of New York City. Today, the low, rough structure is a striking contrast even to the modern church edifice at Briar Creek.

Rev. Thomas Bowman, Sr., the grandfather of Bishop Thomas Bowman, was the leading spirit and chief promoter in the erection of the stone church. Services in the church continued until 1840, when they were discontinued because the church was in great need of repair. A new roof was put on, but soon afterward, it began to fall into rapid decay and ruin. People in the neighborhood stole many of the pews, floor boards, and furniture. All disappeared but one bench and one pew.

This is a one-story structure of rough field stone, plastered and white-washed on the interior, the plaster being applied directly to the stone work. The building formerly had a curved ceiling, but this has been destroyed, and at present, only two of the curved rafters are in place. There is a cross-tie beam approximately midway in the Church, which was formerly a partition, dividing the building into two portions, the smaller one was used as a school and the larger, the Church. It was adopted to school purposes by making the windows lower.

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The original coat, cloak, shawl and hat holder, with its wooden pegs is still in its original place, not far from where the old-fashioned, wood-burning stove stood, which heated the whole room. The rack is partly reconstructed. There is only one original Communion Bench remaining. This is constructed of plain  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch floor boards, the hand hewn legs are mortised in to the seat. There is also one pew remaining, this is made of 1 inch pine boards, with a very stiff back, and very narrow. Both of these original pieces of furniture are crudely made, and probably not usable. The octagonal pulpit now in the church, stands on a very low platform. This is not original. The original pulpit was probably carried away with the other furnishings sometime after 1840. This was a stately and dignified one of box pattern. The head and shoulders of the minister only, were visible to the congregation. An iron rod for a hanging, old-fashioned, wick burning, lard lamp, is still in place. There are eleven windows, all protected with the original shutters of 1 inch boards, with hinges. There are two doors, it is not certain that these are original but they are, at least, similar to the original doors.

The church was in such a woefully delapidated condition that an attempt was made to restore it in 1915. A marble tablet was placed on the west corner of the church, in 1924. A lecturn was presented in 1925, which was partly made of wood first used in the church.

Many of the early settlers have their last resting place in the grave yard adjacent to the church. The oldest tombstone I could find was one of November 13, 1808, that of Thomas Bowman, age 6 years. In recent years, (about 1927) the grave-yard has been restored. Head stones planted in clay soil required constant straightening. They were all replaced in gravel below frost depth and supported on the surface by a concrete base.

Scores of people visit this historic church each year. The greatness of this early church is not in its architectural plan or design, but in the spiritual atmosphere it developed; the effect that the early church had on civic and moral life in the community and its wonderful historical connections.

Author. *Ralph W. Lahr*

Approved. *Ralph W. Lahr*

*May, 1936.*

*Reviewed, Aug. 19, 1936, THW.*